Upcycling a Schol Comm Unit: Building Bridges with Creativity, Reallocations, and Limited Resources

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Upcycling a Schol Comm Unit: Building Bridges with Creativity, Reallocations, and Limited Resources

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Presenters

ABSTRACT

Despite limited resources, the nascent Scholarly Communication Unit of the David L. Rice Library has focused on creatively developing the themes of NASIG's Scholarly Communication Competencies within and outside the library in order to develop scholarly communication services at the University of Southern Indiana. This paper describes the creation and development of the unit, its strengths and weaknesses, and some lessons learned, in the hopes that more libraries like ours will see scholarly communication work as valuable and attainable.

Introduction

There is a substantial body of literature on what an academic library's scholarly communication unit (SCU) could do. But how do you do it when your institution's quasi-official motto is "Doing more with less"? The David L. Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana (USI) upcycled – taking existing resources and converting them into something even more valuable. The knowledge and skills necessary to build the scholarly communication programs have been culled from across the library with strategic reconsideration of job lines and descriptions. Utilizing affordable professional development activities has deepened our ability to support scholarly communication activities on campus.

Realigning positions has also enabled us to leverage existing relationships to produce outreach activities that include our faculty advocates. Similarly, the institutional knowledge within the library and our relationships across campus have allowed us to pursue a particularly creative approach to Open Access funding that does not require a new line of money from the university. Our approach to scholarly communication services has fundamentally been a public service that requires innovative problem-solving in order to identify and enhance competencies within the library so that we can successfully take programs outside the library and strategically reallocate resources to build a SCU that serves our entire campus. In order to translate our experience into a model that can be customized by other academic libraries with limited resources for scholarly communication support, we used the NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians as a frame both to develop the SCU and to implement campus programs.[1]

Team building

Team building is actually the fourth NASIG Core Competency, highlighting the "fundamentally collaborative" nature of scholarly communication work and the need to work across departments within and beyond the library.[2] But when building a SCU, team-building will be the lynchpin to your success, so this is where we'll begin.

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The SCU at USI did not start with a bang. It didn't even start with a new position line. With an impending retirement in the department, the Library Director took a holistic review of the entire Technical Services unit. Technical services work that required librarians was clearly decreasing. A review of the library's strategic goals showed no indication of growth in that area but did speak to supporting scholarly communication – an area undersupported by the library. In a strong move to start meeting these goals, the Library Director recognized the crossover between technical services and scholarly communication, and redesigned the Serials Librarian position, Peter Whiting's position, as a Scholarly Communication Librarian position. Gaps that remained after this realignment were combined with additional needs in the research and instruction and circulation units to create a new Assistant Director and Head of Public Services position, which was filled by Andrea Wright.

With the two positions in place, communication became key to team building. The SCU, comprised of Peter and Andrea, has a standing weekly meeting that allows us to check-in, plan, and work on scholarly communication tasks together. The unit is also a part of the broader Public Services team that has biweekly meetings. This enables individuals from all three units to share information, ask for help, and coordinate their efforts. This coordination is particularly important for the SCU as we are small and represent a new focus for the institution. When it comes to doing the work of the unit, we've avoided both the hierarchical structure approach and splitting down the middle. Instead, we play to our individual strengths and capacity. For example, identifying potential collaborators requires deep knowledge of the university, so Peter takes lead on those tasks. Meanwhile, Andrea has experience with scholarly communication documentation, so she usually writes the first draft of policies and guidelines.

Background knowledge

Scholarly communication requires deep knowledge in areas that cut across traditional silos within academic libraries. This is why a team approach was critical to the success of the SCU's founding at USI.

Peter's background is in technical services, which has significant overlap with scholarly communication. Metadata knowledge, cataloging for discovery, and increasing patron access are just a sample of topics important to both fields. Andrea's career started in research and instruction. Her experience with building direct relationships with faculty and students to maximize library impact, along with developing educational and awareness opportunities, is important for scholarly communication outreach. The early work of the SCU was also aided by the team's variety of experience at USI. Peter has extensive knowledge of USI's structures and culture. Andrea brings awareness of how scholarly communication programs have developed at different institutions. Building a team with different backgrounds, but a shared sense of teamwork and enthusiasm, helped the SCU make significant contributions in just two years.

While "play to your strengths" is a wonderful idea, because it is a new unit, some scholarly communication work will be outside of the team's existing knowledge or expertise. It's critical to identify these gaps because you can't address a problem if you don't recognize its presence. Our SCU has used the following resources to deepen our knowledge of scholarly communication issues:

- SPARC – https://sparcopen.org/
- "Open Access" by Peter Suber – https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/open-access
- "Copyright for Educators & Librarians" Coursera Course – https://www.coursera.org/learn/copyright-for-education
- "OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians" edited by Wesolek, Lashley, and Langley – https://commons.pacificu.edu/pup/3/
- "CopyrightX" 12-week course – http://copyx.org/
- Creative Commons Certificate – https://certificates.creativecommons.org/

Technical skills

The takeaway of the NASIG's Core Competency theme on technical skills is to be actively aware of what is happening with technology and how it impacts scholarly communications for faculty and students. As a small SCU, we used networking with other scholarly communication librarians in our region, together with complementary knowledge and perspectives within the Rice Library, to gain deep technical skills for implementing an institutional repository (IR).

Before the Head of Public Services position was filled, it was clear that implementing an IR was high on the Rice Library wish list. Very soon after he moved into the Scholarly Communication Librarian position, Peter started reaching out to other librarians with similar roles in the region, specifically regarding their IRs. He visited several to discuss their experiences with their IR platforms, how they had set up the IR, and the maintenance work they undertake. This gave him technical insight into various systems prior to starting implementation at USI.

Once Andrea was brought into the Rice Library, the SCU quickly formed an IR Implementation Team. In addition to Andrea and Peter, representatives from Library Systems, Administration, University Archives & Special Collections, and Research Services were included. The team was charged to examine viable IRs options, evaluate and select an IR platform, and develop core IR policies and guidelines to facilitate a successful launch so that we would know what we want to achieve as a team.

During fall 2018, the team identified IR platforms and developed a detailed evaluation rubric. Platform demonstrations were open to the entire library staff as well as invited staff from information technology, online learning, and other relevant campus stakeholders. After reviewing the options, the team submitted a recommendation to the Library Director which was approved in December. The team then spent spring 2019 working with the vendor to onboard the IR, developing branding and marketing plans, writing policies and guidelines, and identifying existing projects or groups on campus who might be interested in collaborating on collections. The team disbanded in summer 2019, having successfully completing its mission, leaving the SCU to launch the Scholarly Open Access Repository (SOAR at USI) during Open Access Week 2019.

Scholarly communication requires highly focused and very deep technical skills on platforms which are often unique in their deployment at various institutions. A SCU should look outside of the unit and outside the library when launching new services. Look for literature and training that can aid your SCU; for SOAR at USI, the SCU referred regularly to:

- "Making Institutional Repositories Work" edited by Callicott, Scherer, and Wesolek – http://oapen.org/search?identifier=626981
- "Cornell University Library Repository Principles and Strategies Handbook" – https://confluence.cornell.edu/display/culpublic/Cornell+University+Library+Repository+Principles+and+Strategies+Handbook
- "Toyota's Secret: The A3 Report" by Shook – https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/toyotas-secret-the-a3-report

Outreach and instruction

The NASIG Core Competencies note that, "The development of educational programming, […] online learning objects […], and instruction in areas of scholarly communication literacy for both faculty and students commonly falls under the responsibilities of the SCL."[3] As we launched our unit, we took a concentric growth approach to outreach and instruction, starting within the library, then plugging into existing campus options, and finally creating new programs.

Our outreach started in the library with our website. An initial review revealed a double-edged sword: scholarly communication as a unit and services was completely missing from our website,

while web content that would fall under our purview, such as copyright, was inaccurate. In order to expand content and increase our ability to keep it current, we moved our content areas into LibGuides and worked with the Library Web Committee to add a scholarly communication icon and link to the home page.

As we prepared to go outside the library with scholarly communication outreach, it was helpful to know what groups and events existed on campus with which we could partner to start. For example, every January the university holds a required Spring Meeting on the first workday of the year, planned by the Faculty Senate, that includes breakout sessions from various campus units. Peter's knowledge of the Faculty Senate and Spring Meeting planning from his work as Senate Chair ensured that we were reaching out to the right people at the right time. The SCU secured a breakout session in January 2019 to show part of the "Paywall: The Business of Scholarship" film and include a faculty response panel.[4]

We also made sure to present to committee and council meetings where a good number of faculty from across the campus would be present. Presentations were tailored to specific programs of interest to those groups. For example, SCU presented on the USI Open Access Fund to department chairs and program directors and discussed the opportunity for electronic dissertations and thesis at a meeting of graduate program chairs. These meetings with broad representation led to invitations to college and department meetings where more faculty and staff heard about our unit and its initiatives.

While we made good progress with existing programs in the first year, we also knew that the limited time afforded to us in these meetings would not facilitate the deeper understanding and engagement we were hoping to develop. So, we launched some new programs as well. For the perennial favorite, the faculty workshop, we decided to launch them under a Lunch and Learn branding that could be utilized for library-wide topics and leveraged the power of free cookies and drinks. This past spring, we held three Lunch and Learns, all on scholarly communication topics that were prioritized to match our initial focuses. The Lunch and Learns were well received, and we will continue to have scholarly communication topics in the series next year. During this launch, we realized that faculty and staff on our campus value documentation of professional development that they can include in their review files. As such, we'll be offering tracking and recognition of Lunch and Learn attendance starting this fall.

Putting it all together

In addition to providing a helpful framework for creating a SCU, we continue to use the NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians in our work. As a detailed example, Open Access funding at USI was a faculty-driven initiative. Faculty members had turned to the Library for assistance with article processing charges (APCs) for publishing in Open Access journals. While we could help faculty to navigate their publishing options and to understand the associated copyright implications, the library did not have funding to help pay APCs. Instead, we used our background knowledge, technical skills, outreach and instruction, and team building to overcome limited staffing and resources and led a campus-wide solution.

The provost's office has a faculty development fund to support travel for scholarship presentation or professional leadership activities. It was suggested that this same fund could be expanded to also support scholarly publication by assisting with APC payment. To make this happen, librarians drafted a charge for the Faculty Senate that explained the benefits of Open Access publishing and proposed a process for funding approval. The SCU's background knowledge in Open Access and journal review were central to the charge. Our technical skills were also utilized in drafting fund guidelines and developing digital applications and forms. We also engaged in robust education and outreach, first to Faculty Senate and then on their behalf to department chairs and the faculty. And, team building was very much on display as the SCU expertise was brought together with support (and funding) from the provost's office.

Final thoughts

Developing a SCU in a modestly staffed library with limited funding is not easy. But the NASIG Core Competencies provide a framework that can enable a few enthusiastic librarians to use collaboration and creativity to pull it off. At USI, we took bits and pieces and time and energy (and, maybe, even some hot glue) to upcycle a SCU that has already begun to have a positive impact in the library and across campus.

Notes

1. NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians Task Force, *NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians* (NASIG, August 11, 2017), https://www.nasig.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=310&pk_association_webpage=9435 (accessed May 2, 2019).
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Paywall: The Business of Scholarship*, Vimeo streaming film, 1:04:48, produced and directed by Jason Schmitt in 2018, https://paywallthemovie.com/paywall (accessed November 27, 2019).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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